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The Amazon Effect, Virtual Approval Plans, and the Changing Nature of Book Selection

Rick Lugg

R2 Consulting, rick@r2consulting.org

Ruth Fischer

R2 Consulting

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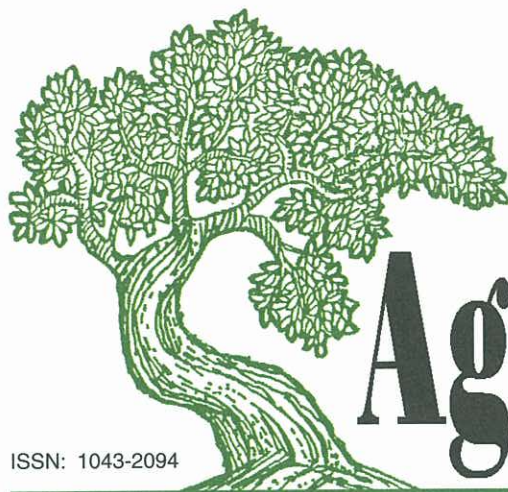
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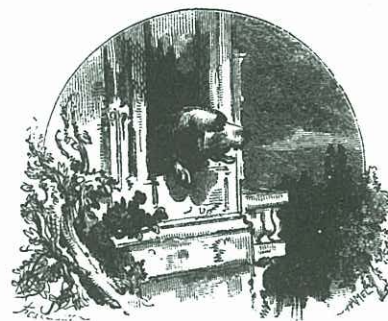
Against the Grain

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"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

The Amazon Effect, Virtual Approval Plans, and the Changing Nature of Book Selection

by **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer** (Partners, R2 Consulting, 63 Woodwell's Garrison, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 603-746-5991; Fax: 603-746-6052)
<rick@r2consulting.org> www.ebookmap.net



The Amazon Effect, Virtual Approval Plans, and the Changing Nature of Book Selection. Although the phrase sounds more like the title of a **Robert Ludlum** thriller than an actual phenomenon, the **Amazon Effect** echoes through the working days of all of us who deal with books and information: librarians, publishers, and vendors. From its inception, **Amazon** used the Web to expand the fundamentals of retail bookselling, bringing to readers a vast selection of titles and previously unknown levels of convenience. Because of its prominence in the media and mass market, **Amazon** has also influenced user expectations for library services: i.e., why doesn't the library's OPAC look more like **Amazon.com**?

The appeal is easily understood. This morning, I pointed my Web browser at **Amazon**, where I was welcomed by name. Several recommendations for new book titles anticipated my arrival — some inexplicably, but several of genu-

ine interest. Clustered around the cover image of each title were satellites of bibliographic and evaluative information: a description; publication data; reviews, both editorial and customer; sample pages, including front & back flap copy, full index, table of contents, preface and introduction, excerpts from the text; links to other works by the same author; subject browsing capabilities; and a pre-formulated search by subject category.

In addition, a number of transaction options appeared, including:

- View alternate editions of the content (new/used; paper/cloth; audio CD/audio cassette; various eBook formats)
- Obtain price information for each format
- Add titles to a wish list
- Add titles to shopping cart (select and order)

In essence, a complete suite of services to help an individual identify, evaluate, choose, and transact upon titles of interest. As patrons with the OPAC, library selectors may well ask: "Why don't library book selection tools look more like this?"

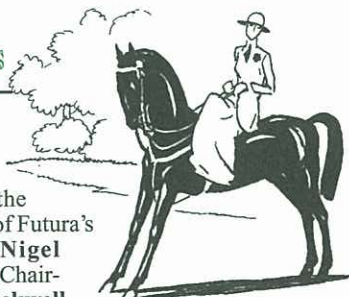
We have already seen the beginnings of the transformation of the online library catalog, first in the advent of Web OPACs over the past few

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If Rumors Were Horses

Blackwell Publishing has purchased **Futura Publishing** and **Futura Media Services** company assets on Friday April 19th, 2002. **Futura Publishing Company**, a leading publisher in cardiology and vascular diseases, was founded in 1970 by **Steven Korn** and **Jacques Strauss**, who will remain with the company as the **Futura** imprint is integrated into **Blackwell Publishing**. The **Futura** list includes six journals and over 200 books, CD-ROMs and runs a growing program of continuing medical education (CME) meetings each year under **Futura Media Services**. The acquisition enables **Blackwell** to extend its medical publishing presence. In turn, **Blackwell's** global sales, marketing and online services will increase the

profile of **Futura** copyrights and boost the readership of **Futura's** authors. **Nigel Blackwell** (Chairman of **Blackwell Publishing**) commented, "The addition of such a strong programme with its outstanding authors and editors will I hope be taken as a clear signal that we are serious in our ambitions for the company and for medical publishing." For more information, contact: **Emily Gillingham** <emily.gillingham@



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The Amazon Effect
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years. Perhaps more tellingly, we have begun to see traditional MARC record display enhanced in various ways — with links to excerpted or full text, or to extended metadata, such as tables of contents, reviews, jacket images, etc. Services such as Sirsi's iBistro/iLink, Endeavor's LinkFinder Plus, ExLibris's MetaLib and SFX, Innovative Interfaces' WebBridge, and others all (in varying ways) connect the OPAC user conveniently to extended or related resources, and are rapidly being adopted by libraries.

For our purposes here, though, we're interested in the experience of a different type of user — the library selector. In order to make timely buying decisions, selectors need detailed information much earlier in the publishing cycle — at point of publication, or better yet, at point of announcement. These special requirements present some additional problems. First, most of the linking solutions noted above work only from the OPAC or public display, and not from the Acquisitions or staff display module, where approval "accept/reject" decisions and ordering transactions occur. Second, the current emphasis in linking is on directing the patron to available and appropriate resources — rather than on a selector seeking *potential* resources for acquisition or licensing. For selectors, links to

with the same degree of confidence as a book in hand would supply. Such a development could change both types of approval selection; notification slips or form selections would carry links to much more extensive data, while acceptance or rejection of profiled approval books could be done before the physical books were shipped.

Granting for just a moment that this selection environment, which we'll refer to as the "Virtual Approval Plan," can be created, we need to explore its effect on new title selection. In some respects, this concept is less a potential product than a vehicle for examining the changing nature of selection in libraries. Even given a complete electronic surrogate for every new title, it is not clear whether monographs will continue to be selected title-by-title (either through approval review or selection from slips) or whether, as some suspect, less and less such activity will take place, as selectors are pulled in other directions by their myriad responsibilities. Will selection be increasingly managed in collections or "subject chunks" of content, either by relying on the approval profile (and not reviewing books), or, as with electronic journal packages and eBooks, by purchasing pre-defined collections of content?

This edition of *ATG* attempts to explore, synthesize, and speculate upon a number of developments in the library marketplace: the **Amazon Effect**; the continuing evolution of ILS and book vendor Web systems; **ONIX**;

different kinds of resources are needed. Third, because approval plans supply new titles, extended metadata and reviews are often not yet available at the time of selection.

In the articles that follow, we will focus on emerging solutions to these problems. We will consider how the increasing availability and use of extended metadata and the technologies that underpin it might transform approval plan and notification slip selection. Our premise is that the enabling technologies and standards exist (or will soon exist) that can produce a "virtual book" or enough of a book surrogate to allow a title to be evaluated online —

DOI; **OpenURL** and related services such as **SFX**; the emergence of metadata providers such as **Syndetic Solutions** and **Informata's Content Server**; and the ability to link diverse Web resources in a "synoptic" view—as through an **SFX** or **DOI** "extended services" menu. Our hypothesis is that creative use of these elements could result in a new service that may be of interest to libraries and vendors: the Virtual Approval Plan. We believe that such a service is within reach, in terms of both technology and data availability. We'll try to make that case. But the real intent is to open up thinking about how library content selection might evolve — with or without such tools.

We've been fortunate to enlist some excellent contributors, each of whom will look at a different facet of this question. The discussion is structured along these lines, and we recommend reading these articles in the order suggested below.

1) What extent and kinds of descriptive metadata are available immediately upon or before publication? From what sources?

- **ONIX and Publishers:** Michael Holdsworth of Cambridge University Press describes the evolution of **ONIX**, an XML-based standard for new title information, and in particular how Cambridge has created a Web-accessible DataShop to provide **ONIX** files to vendors, online booksellers, and other interested parties. He notes the advantages to librarians and vendors, and argues for the publisher as source of authoritative information about its books. "*And all of this can be made available months before the first copy of the book is even printed.*" [Read "**ONIX: A Transforming Standard**," pg. 22]. Clearly, for **ONIX** information to be a useful component of a virtual approval shelf, where the works of hundreds of publishers may be represented, widespread adoption and implementation by publishers is necessary.

- Major approval vendors increasingly provide extended metadata in the electronic slips offered via Web services such as **Blackwell's Collection Manager** or **YBP's GOBI**. **Blackwell's** pioneered the capture of Table of Contents data in the mid-1990s, and **TOC** data is now available via **Collection Manager** for most approval titles. Typically, the table of contents is available within one week of approval profiling — in time to inform a selection decision. **YBP**, similarly, obtains **TOC** information from **Informata's** "Content Server" and makes it available via **GOBI**.

- Third-Party Metadata Providers: **Syndetic Solutions**, **Informata**, and **Bowker**, among others, now create, aggregate, and host or distribute descriptive metadata to libraries, online booksellers, ILS vendors, and their partners.

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• **Informata's Content Server** currently contains 625,000 jacket scans and 250,000 tables of contents. Full-text reviews are under verbal agreements and will be incorporated within the next few months. Annotations, mainly from publisher marketing copy, will also be added. Although provision of full-text presents licensing issues, Informata is seeking to license excerpts. All of this data is available by license to ILS or book vendors, for OPAC or staff side display.

• **Syndetic Solutions** currently makes available 370,000 tables of contents (aggregated from **Blackwell's** and **Ingram**) 200,000 annotations (from *Book News*); first chapters and excerpts; cover images (from **Ingram**) author biographies, and reviews from **CHOICE**. **Syndetics** also offers a unique service for fiction titles, in which genre, sub-genre, location, and characters are explicitly identified and tagged. Discussions are underway with some academic publishers for 2-3 page excerpts that might be displayed under Fair Use terms. Future plans include provision of indexes and bibliographies.

• **OCLC Extended WorldCat**: As of December 2001, **OCLC** began receiving "evaluative" data, including cover images, book summaries, and author notes from publisher catalogs, as well as table of contents data from **Ingram**. In addition, of course, **WorldCat** provides a full MARC record and holdings information for one's own library and others — information which can also influence a selection decision.

• **Bowker's booksinprint.com** includes data on *Forthcoming Books* as well as tables of contents, cover images, reviews, and "Hooks to Holdings" a feature that allows an **OPAC** search using Z39.50. Like **Informata**, they also provide real-time inventory data for several vendors, via **OptiWare**.

2) Structuring a "synoptic view" of diverse Web resources from the Acquisitions module, or from vendor Web systems. What standards and technologies can enable linking to extended metadata, and bringing it conveniently to the attention of selectors?

If metadata might be available from any number of sources, as is currently the case, the best hope for obtaining a critical mass of information rests in using *all* available sources, but without having to search or query each individually. The selector requires a "synoptic" view of possible selection determinants, including descriptive metadata, holdings information, fund availability, and a record of comments or decisions by other selectors. The most compelling representations of a synoptic view are the library-defined "extended services" menus produced by services like **SFX** and **WebBridge** (though

AUTHOR BIOS

Rick Lugg and Ruth Fischer formed R2 Consulting in January 2000, after a combined 28 years at YBP Library Services. R2 helps libraries to improve workflows from selection to access, and to optimize use of ILS and materials vendor systems. They work with vendors on product development and with publishers on selling eContent to libraries. They live in Contoocook, NH with their children, Emily and Lincoln.

the former relies on the more flexible OpenURL, while the latter relies on a fixed and predictable URL.)

Extended services for a library selector would encompass all available bibliographic information about a title, up to and including temporary access to the full text. It would include links to alternate versions of the content, other works by the same author, links to library or consortial holdings, transaction information, and a facility for recording decisions or opinions and communicating with other selectors. Most, if not all, of these capabilities exist now, but they are dispersed across multiple systems and providers. Linking them could, in effect, create a selector's workstation.

But where should this synoptic view be created — i.e., where does the selector most often work? In the vendor Web system? In the ILS selection/acquisitions module? (In reality, most selectors probably still work from paper slips or from hands-on review of approval books, but which system do they consult for additional information and to record their selection decisions?)

• **Innovative Interfaces'** **Ted Fons** argues for the centrality of the ILS in the virtual approval plan model. Innovative is currently the only vendor to support user-defined external Web linking from the Acquisitions module, using a tool known as **WebBridge**. [Read "The Virtual Selection Process — The ILS Perspective," pg. 26].

• While **Innovative's WebBridge** is unique in its accessibility via the Acquisitions module, it does rely on a predictable URL, which limits the resources to which it can link. Linking services such as **SFX**, based on the OpenURL framework, offer an alternative, by "providing a standardized format for transporting bibliographic metadata about objects between information services." In effect, an information resource that is OpenURL-aware generates an actionable URL upon demand. A user's "service component" (e.g., its **SFX** server) will then provide appropriate extended service links, based on rules and resources defined in **SFX** by the library administrator. For a selector, the extended services might include holdings from **OCLC**, a table of contents from **Syndetic Solutions**, an excerpt from the publisher's **ONIX** site, full text display via **ebrary**, and a bibliographic record within the library's **Collection Manager** account. Provided, of course, that all of these resources are OpenURL-compliant.

There is work to be done to create this environment, but many of the tools and materials already exist.

• **OCLC Resolution Services** is still in development but boasts an innovative design. Formerly known as **Open Names**, this is essentially a global registry for metadata, clustered around the **ISTC (International Standard Text Code)**, a pre-ISBN identifier. (This use of **ISTC**, rather than **ISBN**, as a nucleus for versions and services is a major development in itself, with much import for this discussion, but is beyond our scope for now.) Any metadata provider who has information about a particular work can "register" that metadata with **OCLC Resolution Services**. In effect, this registry, based on OpenURL, will, similarly to **SFX**, aggregate and integrate an array of metadata sources. When, for example, a **WorldCat** search retrieves an **ISTC** or related **ISBN** for which descriptive metadata is wanted, the user can opt to view a menu of available metadata sources, and link to their sites. This service is still being built, and discussions with metadata providers are still in early stages. In addition, it would need to accept a search or link from an ILS or vendor system in order to support selection — else it becomes yet another locale for selection activity. But it bears watching.

3) How might libraries or vendors be affected by a Virtual Approval Plan? What are the barriers? Opportunities?

Perhaps the most important perspectives are those of selectors and the vendors who might consider such services. We hear from some of them in these additional articles:

• A consortial composition effort from five librarians representing the **Tri-Colleges (Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, and Haverford)** speculates on possible uses of a virtual approval plan in an environment where approval selection is shared among geographically dispersed selectors at multiple institutions. When several selectors must consider the same title, and share decisions about its merit and eventual location, perhaps "virtuality" increases in value. The fact that **Amy McColl** and **Amy Morrison** of **Swarthmore College**, **Eric Pumroy** of **Bryn Mawr**, **Norm Medeiros** of **Haverford**, and **Linda Bills** of the **Tri-College Consortium Office** managed to collaborate on this article should give us all new hope that cooperative collection development may actually be possible!

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ONIX – A Transforming Standard

by **Michael Holdsworth** (Press Business Development Director, Cambridge University Press) <myh@cambridge.org>



The new superstores of the 1990s (**Borders** and **Barnes & Noble** in the USA; **Dillons** and **Waterstones** in the UK;) discovered a simple truth. The greater the range of titles offered, the greater the sales. Critical to this growth was the serendipity of “found” sales — when a bookbuyer comes into a shop for one book and leaves with three. Superstores replaced cramped uniformity with spacious diversity; now **amazon.com**, the “world’s biggest bookstore,” expands those choices to every available title. Previously hard-to-find backlist is taking an increasing share of total sales away from “top-twenty” bestsellers.

Internet bookselling created almost overnight a need for better descriptive product information. It was a need that the publishing industry simply had not recognised before and which it had no way of satisfying. A new standard for the exchange of bibliographic “metadata” — industry-wide agreement both on the data structures, and on the messaging protocol — was urgently required. Enter **ONIX** — the fruit of parallel transatlantic initiatives, which brought together the **AAP**, the **Book Industry Study Group** and the UK’s **Book Industry Communications (BIC)** under the umbrella of **EDiTEUR**, the international book industry standards body. The first issue of the **ONIX** standard appeared in late 1999.

Full information on **ONIX** can be found at www.editeur.org.

ONIX represents the most transforming new standard in our industry since the **ISBN**. The **ISBN** may be a deceptively simple and

undervalued identifier, but it has for nearly forty years formed a stable business base for discovering, organizing, sharing, trading and profiting from content. The *lingua franca* of any standard builds and grows partnership and community — and there is perhaps no global partnership as unified by a single standard as the community of publishers, booksellers, library vendors, wholesalers, librarians and scholars.

ONIX is a standard written in **XML (EXtensible Mark-up Language)**, a near-relation of **SGML** and **HTML**. Simply put, this means that it is plaintext based, consensual, universal, independent of operating system, application or platform. Which makes it affordable — and, to some extent at least — as readable, and as easily generated, by people as it is by machines. Simple marker tags within the data (expressed as angle brackets) identify when individual data fields start (<) and end (>), and are named according to **ONIX** rules. Think of using **Styles (italic, bold)** in **Microsoft Word**. Thus:

```
<ISBN>0521645956</ISBN>
<EAN13>9780521645959</EAN13>
<ProductForm>DB</ProductForm>
<ProductFormDescription>Paperback</ProductFormDescription>
<DistinctiveTitle> Capitalism Russian-Style </DistinctiveTitle>
```

This is no more or less complicated than clicking on, for example, an *italic* style in Word, then clicking on it again when you want to switch it off. All Word is doing is placing invisible tags at either end of the text.

What you ask a computer to do with this tagged text, or how you map it into a database, is up to you. While this means that **ONIX** is first and foremost a messaging standard, many publishers, particularly those building bibliographical databases for the first time, have taken **ONIX** as the basic design architecture and data dictionary. This has certainly been the case at **Cambridge**, where a suite of customised product and bibliographical databases have been reconfigured to match the **ONIX** data structure. The issue is usually one of **ONIX** either splitting or lumping data elements that may not have been separated in the original databases. When these older databases run templated desk-top publishing outputs — for example, for printed publicity and catalogues, or form the dynamic source-data for the publisher’s Web catalogue or e-commerce, the necessary adjustments can require considerable care in the implementation.

Since its launch in 1999, wider possibilities of **ONIX** as a single messaging structure for product information have been recognised. While constantly retaining a commitment to backward compatibility (to enable usability across revised versions of the standard), **ONIX** has been extended to encompass videocassette/DVD “biblio,” and eBooks. Minor tweaks to the structure have been incorporated to gain adoption of the new standard, beyond the English-speaking world, in France and in Germany, taking **ONIX** International from a multinational to a multi-lingual context. Discussions are underway

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[Read “The Virtual Approval Shelf: A Look Towards the Future?”, pg. 28”].

• **Stephen Pugh** of **YBP’s International Division** writes as an approval profiler with many years of experience with selectors in US and International libraries. Selectors, he argues, barely have time to consider the paper and electronic announcements they now receive — will anyone actually embrace “slips on steroids?” [Read “The Decline of the Poultry Selector,” pg. 32].

Some Final Ruminations:

In this speculation about the virtual approval plan, we’ve deliberately focused on what may be possible, perhaps stretching credulity. In our temporary suspension of

disbelief, we’ve ignored some very real questions, which we must at least acknowledge in closing:

- The timeliness of data is critical in new title selection, and many of the data sources discussed still rely upon a published copy of the book to capture cover images, tables of contents, etc. The best hope for improved timeliness rests with publishers, and the degree to which a critical mass of them implement **ONIX**, with as much information as early in the publishing cycle as possible. That **ONIX** data may then be imported into vendor systems, or accessed by a link to the publisher site.

- It would be possible to test the timeliness of extended metadata for selection very easily. Identify the 800 or so titles profiled in a typical week by approval

vendors. Search each of them in a defined set of extended metadata sources to determine what percentage link to sufficient information for a selection decision that week. Any library school students looking for an interesting project?

- Vendor systems such as **Gobi** or **Collection Manager** play a significant role in approval selection in many libraries. For these services to thrive in a virtual approval environment, their systems may need to become **OpenURL**-compliant — certainly as target resources, perhaps as service providers.

Perhaps the biggest question of all, though, is an economic one: Is it sufficiently in anyone’s interest to assemble all the pieces? If we build it, will they buy? 🐼